

Conducting Positive Family Meetings

Objective

To facilitate positive family meetings that provide a structured way to deal with problems and concerns while at home during the coronavirus outbreak.

You Should Know

Families are adjusting to being home together because of the coronavirus pandemic. Parents and children are sharing space and resources, possibly resulting in stress, irritability, and frustration. Conducting positive family meetings can bring everyone together for open communication and enhanced connection during this uncertain time.

Family meetings have several benefits. They enable family members to discuss problems before they escalate. They teach children how to negotiate, compromise, and express themselves. Because everyone's voice is heard and valued, family meetings can build children's self-esteem. Perhaps most importantly, during times of change family meetings are an effective way to check in and see how everyone is doing.

Some guidelines:

- If you are introducing family meetings for the first time, expect some pushback from older children and teens. Explain why these meetings will be important for your family and how they can benefit everyone.
- Family meetings are most effective when they are held regularly, usually once a week. For instance, if Sunday dinners have always been a consistent way to bring your family together, consider holding the meeting immediately after dinner.
- Be flexible. Take into account the ages and attention spans of your children when determining how long a meeting should be. You might also need to change the agenda and plan of action to address new issues and concerns that arise during the week.
- Be creative. Start or end the meeting with a fun activity, game, or project to make it more enjoyable and interactive, and less like a "requirement."
- Family meetings are ineffective when used to lecture family members or point out mistakes. Instead, for example, if your children are not picking up after themselves, you could say, "The house is messier than usual this week. What can we all do about that?"
- When discussing issues and agenda items, give everyone a chance to speak. Rotate the responsibility of leading the meeting among family members who are old enough, so that each can take ownership.

- Agree on ground rules, which can be written down and updated as needed. Here are some examples:
 1. Each family member can speak without judgment or interruption.
 2. Meetings are a technology-free zone.
 3. When solving problems, majority rules. If a difficult issue cannot be solved, parents have the final word.
 4. Each family member has input in determining the meeting's agenda.
 5. To avoid blame or argument, each speaker will use "I" statements to express feelings and thoughts. For example, say "I feel [sad, angry, happy] when [family member] does [action or behavior]."

What ground rules would be most effective for your family? Write them down below.

Develop a rough outline for the weekly agenda, but be flexible in order to address last-minute issues or concerns. Here are some suggestions:

1. Name one good thing that happened this week, something you are proud of, or something nice you did for a family member.
2. What topics or issues would you like to discuss today?
3. Coronavirus-related topics:
 - What are you most concerned about?
 - Are you having any problems with your online schooling or remote work that you want to share?
 - What can you do to help someone else in the family or the neighborhood next week?
4. What worked well for our family this week?
5. What didn't work well for our family this week? What could we do better?
6. Assignments of chores and meal planning.
7. What will we work on in the coming week, and who will be responsible?
8. Activity: baking [family member's] favorite dessert.

Add your own ideas for your agenda outline here.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Finally, record your family’s plan of action. Make a list of which family will do what, and when, including tasks and chores that have been delegated. You can post this list on the refrigerator as a reminder, or hang a whiteboard in a common area. Also, keep track of decisions that were made during the meeting in case you need to refer back to them.

What to Do

Use the following worksheet to record your family meetings, including what was discussed, what worked well, what did not work well, and what you would like to change for the next meeting.

Date	What Happened/What was Discussed	What Worked Well	What Didn't Work Well	What to Change for the Next Meeting

Reflections on This Exercise

In what ways did having family meetings effectively address problems and concerns?

What family meeting conversations were most beneficial for you and your family?

What family meeting conversations were most surprising?

What were the greatest challenges? Explain.
